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Colonel William M. Pallozzi
Secretary

Brian S. Geraci
State Fire Marshal

August 5, 2015

Letter to the Editor
The Star Democrat
Easton, Maryland

Dear Editor:

I had the opportunity to read your July 31, 2015 article "Sprinkle down economics" I am writing you at this time to provide another side to the story. Residential sprinklers are life saving systems not only for the occupants but for our firefighters as well. The current fire dynamics within a home these days has changed dramatically thus the need to provide the necessary protection of the occupants.

The cost for installing fire sprinklers in new homes continues to decline in Maryland and across the country. The current national average cost to sprinker a new home is \$1.35 per sprinkled square foot, which does not include the garage, attic, and small closets, as they are not required. Homes that are not supplied by a domestic water system may incur an additional cost of approximately \$2,500 for a pump and water tank. The current average cost to sprinker a new home in Maryland is \$1.00 to \$2.00 a square foot. The figures quoted in your article of the cost ranging from \$5,000 to \$25,000 would be appropriate for a new home of 3,700 to 18,000 square feet. According to the national Census Bureau, the average home, built in 2013, was approximately 2,600 square feet.

To date, we have lost 35 individuals in the State, due to the ravages of fires. In 2014, we saw 64 individuals lose their lives to fires across the State. Most of those were our vulnerable populations, to include the very young, elderly, and physically impaired. The data reveals that these individuals are dying from fires inside their homes. Residential fire sprinkler systems do save lives and not one person has died from a fire in a sprinklered home or building in the state of Maryland. We have seen, in Maryland and across the country, more individuals that are dying in home fires with a working smoke alarm, but lacking fire sprinklers. In the last five years 77 individuals died in home fires where the smoke alarm was present and working.

Modern construction practices, open spaces and synthetic furnishings have dramatically reduced safe evacuation times for residential structures. The time between an operating smoke alarm and the onset of untenable conditions are becoming shorter. As I have already noted, those that need more time to escape clearly need the extra protection provided by a residential sprinkler system. These life-saving systems not only save the lives of the residents, but of our firefighters as well. In comparison the homes that you and I lived in with cotton based furniture took 30 minutes for the room of origin to become fully involved with fire. Today's homes it takes less than 4 minutes.

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Having a community that is protected by residential fire sprinklers helps to provide longevity to the volunteer fire and rescue system. In our rural counties across the State, the response time is longer for the volunteer systems to arrive on the scene of an incident. Once a smoke alarm sounds within your home, you only have about four minutes or less to respond and escape the effects of fire. Having the fire sprinkler system in place will increase the amount of time allotted to escape and to potentially extinguish or control the fire until the fire department is on the scene. It will cost a family more to bury a loved one than it will to have a residential sprinkler system installed in a new home.

I hope that this has been informative and helpful in addressing some of the issue you have raised regarding residential sprinkler systems for new single family homes. Should you have any further questions or concerns regarding this matter you may contact me directly. I may be reached by mail at 1201 Reisterstown Road, Pikesville, Maryland 21208 or by telephone at 410-653-8980.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian S. Geraci".

Brian S. Geraci
State Fire Marshal